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New York

President:	Sir John Sawers	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
Members:	Austria	Mr. Ebner
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	Mexico	Mr. Heller
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	Turkey	Mr. Çorman
	Uganda	Mr. Rugunda
	United States of America	Mr. Wolff
	Viet Nam	Mr. Bui The Giang

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 11.10 a.m.

Tribute to the memory of United Nations personnel

The President: Before we start, I should just like to recall that many of us were present at this morning's commemoration of the sixth anniversary of the Canal Hotel bombing in Baghdad, in which Special Representative Sergio Vieira de Mello and 21 other colleagues of ours from the United Nations were killed. I believe it is appropriate that we bear in mind this sombre anniversary as a backdrop for our important work today.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

It is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Fernandez-Taranco: Since my last briefing and the open debate on 27 July on the situation in the Middle East (see S/PV.6171), there have been several important developments on the ground and continued international efforts to create the conditions for the prompt resumption and early conclusion of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. United States Envoy Mitchell completed a regional visit on 29 July to seek commitments and actions from the parties, including with regard to the implementation of phase I Road Map obligations, as well as on broader regional steps, as outlined by the Quartet in its Trieste statement of 26 June. The Quartet envoys met in the office of the Special Coordinator in Jerusalem on 31 July in a follow-up to the principals' meeting in Trieste, and are expected to meet again soon.

During September, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee and Quartet principals are expected to meet on the margins of the general debate. The principals will also consult with the members of the League of Arab States Follow-Up Committee on the Arab Peace Initiative. The Secretary-General looks forward to those meetings as important benchmarks for progress in the renewed effort by the international community this year to achieve genuine forward movement on the political, security and economic tracks.

In the West Bank, the Palestinian Authority continues its efforts to impose law and order in Palestinian cities and towns. Since mid-June there has been a notable decrease in the number of Palestinians injured by Israeli military activities, and we hope this welcome trend will continue. Attacks by Israeli settlers on Palestinians and their property continued, along with a lack of enforcement of the rule of law. Altogether, 24 Palestinians, of whom five were children, and seven Israelis, all adults, were injured. There were no fatalities to report.

In last month's briefing, we reported that Israel had eased some movement restrictions, improving access to certain West Bank towns and aiding efforts to improve living conditions and promote economic growth. According to the Nablus Chamber of Commerce, that city has seen a slow, albeit significant, revival of commercial activity since the beginning of the year. In addition, the Government of Israel announced that, as of 5 August, passenger crossing hours at Allenby Bridge will be expanded on a pilot basis, which we hope will ease the flow of the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who visit the West Bank. This measure follows an earlier announcement of the expansion of commercial crossing hours, an important step for facilitating Palestinian exports.

We welcome these actions and the statement of the Government of Israel that it intends to take further steps to ease movement and access. This is essential if change is to become truly transformative, because significant obstacles to movement and access persist in the West Bank, including around East Jerusalem; the total number of obstacles stands at 614. Other measures that would greatly enhance economic

development in the West Bank include further removal of obstacles; removal of the permit requirement for Palestinians to travel into the Jordan Valley; significantly improved access to East Jerusalem; an increased number of permits for Palestinian workers in Israel; and increased capacity of commercial crossings and redeployment of Palestinian customs authorities to Allenby Bridge. The easing of the tight restrictions on infrastructure development in Area C is also critical for Palestinian economic development.

We continue to be concerned at the critical budget deficit facing the Palestinian Authority. We welcome recent transfers made by key donors, who have made significant pledges, and we encourage all donors to fulfil pledges made in Paris in December 2007 and at Sharm el-Sheikh in March of this year.

The issue of continued Israeli settlement activity in East Jerusalem and the West Bank is a matter of grave concern. We urge the Government of Israel to heed the call of the Quartet to honour its Road Map obligations and freeze all settlement activity, including natural growth, and to remove outposts erected since March 2001. Also, the barrier, which deviates significantly from the 1967 line into occupied Palestinian territory despite the statement by the International Court of Justice that this is contrary to international law, continues to restrict Palestinian access to East Jerusalem, as well as to key social services and agricultural land.

Israeli actions in support of settlers in the heart of East Jerusalem have been a matter of particular concern in the reporting period. On 2 August, following a decision by the Israeli High Court, Israeli security forces forcibly evicted nine Palestinian families, amounting to 53 people, including 20 children, from their homes in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of East Jerusalem. Under the protection of Israeli security forces, the property was handed over to a settlement organization, and Israeli settlers took over the buildings immediately after the evictions. The families evicted are now living on the sidewalk near the homes from which they were forcibly removed, and tensions in the area remain high. Settlement plans in other parts of Sheikh Jarrah have put approximately 450 other residents of the neighbourhood at risk of displacement. In addition, on 5 August, eight Palestinians were injured in clashes with Israeli forces delivering demolition orders in the Al-Bustan neighbourhood of East Jerusalem.

We reiterate our call to Israel to adhere to international law and its Road Map obligations, and to cease and reverse provocative actions such as the demolitions and evictions in East Jerusalem. We remind Israel of the Quartet's united position on this issue, and of its recent affirmation that unilateral actions cannot prejudge the outcome of negotiations and will not be recognized by the international community.

Turning to the situation in and around Gaza, there have been serious developments inside the Strip. Late last week, a radical group calling itself Jund Ansar Allah, armed with firearms, rocket-propelled grenades and explosives, took refuge inside a mosque in Rafah, declared an Islamic emirate and criticized Hamas for insufficient efforts to launch attacks against Israel and apply strict sharia law. After that group refused to respond to calls by Hamas for its surrender, on 14 August a violent confrontation ensued, in which at least 28 people were killed and more than 100 wounded, among them a number of unarmed civilians.

Both the de facto security forces in Gaza and the militant wing of Hamas were involved in acting against the group, and heightened security measures were put in place in other parts of the Gaza Strip. These events highlight concerns regarding the radicalization of certain elements in Gaza, the dangers of continued smuggling of weapons and explosives into the Strip, the absence of an appropriate legal framework for ensuring public security and order, and the need for full respect of international humanitarian law by all parties to ensure the protection of civilians.

These developments took place during a period in which there have been no casualties due to Israeli-Palestinian violence. A relative calm, enforced on the Gaza side by Hamas, prevails. However, there were two rocket and mortar attacks against Israel by militant groups in the Gaza Strip, including an attack on 9 August on the Erez crossing point while Palestinian patients were being evacuated for medical treatment in Israel.

In response, Israeli forces conducted an air raid shelling the areas of the tunnels under the Egypt-Gaza border. Israeli forces have also conducted six ground incursions during the reporting period. Since the last report to the Council, four more lives have been lost in accidents in the tunnels. Nevertheless, large-scale

smuggling continues. This, along with the closure regime, is undermining the regular economy and people's livelihoods in Gaza, as well as forces of political moderation.

Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), which calls for mechanisms to prevent illicit trafficking of arms and ammunition into Gaza and for the sustained reopening of the crossing points, is yet to be operationalized. Overall, an average of 87 trucks per day were allowed into Gaza, as compared to 78 per day in July. This is significantly higher than the 18 trucks per day in November 2008, before the start of Operation Cast Lead. However, in May 2007, prior to the imposition of the comprehensive closure regime, 475 trucks per day were entering Gaza as part of normal commerce and trade. Today, the overwhelming majority of imports are limited to food and sanitation items, with little or no entry for all other goods, including items intended for recovery.

Notwithstanding that, there were some positive developments with respect to access. On 27 July, for the first time in 10 months, Israel permitted the shipment of 100,000 litres of diesel and 40,000 litres of gasoline into Gaza for private use. On 6 August, three truckloads of cement and steel bars were allowed into Gaza for the Palestinian Water Authority's north Gaza wastewater treatment plant. While welcome, these measures are not sufficient to meet the needs of Gaza's civilian population.

Consultations are ongoing with the Israeli authorities regarding the United Nations proposal to start early recovery construction activities for schools, homes and health clinics in Gaza. We hope for and expect a clear answer on the proposal from the Israeli Government very soon. The passage of time leaves little hope of rebuilding homes, education and health facilities before winter, which is essential to begin restoring a semblance of normality to life for the civilian population. It remains unacceptable that no early recovery or reconstruction activities for the Gaza civilian population have been enabled some seven months after Operation Cast Lead. We also reiterate that the United Nations has effective measures in place to ensure the integrity of programming in Gaza.

We continue to call for the release of Israeli Corporal Gilad Shalit. We express the hope that negotiations on a prisoner exchange will be pursued in good faith by both parties to facilitate his release, along with the release of a number of the more than 11,000 Palestinian prisoners being held in Israeli jails.

Following the public hearings in Gaza and Geneva that were reported on last month, the fact-finding mission led by Justice Goldstone has completed its investigations and is in the process of finalizing its report. The report is expected to be issued in early September, with presentation and discussion of the report at the Human Rights Council scheduled for 29 September.

Between 3 and 10 August, the Fatah party of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas held its sixth party congress in Bethlehem, the first in 20 years and the first in the occupied Palestinian territory. Most Fatah members from Gaza were unable to participate following prevention of their travel by Hamas, but voted by telephone. President Abbas was elected by acclamation as Fatah leader and Chairman of the party's Central Committee. Nineteen other Fatah members, 14 of whom were not members of the previous Central Committee, were elected to the new Central Committee, and a new Revolutionary Council was elected.

We continue to call for efforts to reunite Gaza and the West Bank within the framework of the legitimate Palestinian Authority. We support Egypt in its efforts in this regard and hope that reconciliation talks are resumed again in earnest soon.

In the occupied Syrian Golan, the situation remained quiet, although Israeli settlement activity continued. During a visit to the area on 10 August, Special Coordinator Serry expressed the continued commitment of the United Nations to a comprehensive regional peace and our hope for the early resumption of negotiations between Israel and Syria.

Turning now to Lebanon, efforts to form a new Government continued since my last briefing on 27 July. Political leaders announced that they had reached an agreement on the distribution of Cabinet seats, but not yet on the names of ministers. We expect the new Government to commit to the full implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006).

The overall situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has remained generally quiet. The tensions in the area of Khirbat Salim and Kfar Shouba have gradually

subsided. The investigation into the 14 July incident in Khirbat Salim is ongoing. Separately, in the early hours of 17 August, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) removed the watchtower that they had earlier set up south of the Line of Withdrawal near the village of Kfar Shouba, where there had been protests and the consequent violation of the Blue Line by a group of civilians on 17 July.

The Special Coordinator, Mr. Michael Williams, and UNIFIL Force Commander, Major General Claudio Graziano, have been in constant contact with the Lebanese Armed Forces, Israeli authorities and the IDF command in order to defuse the tension caused by the incidents of recent weeks in southern Lebanon. We believe that the dismantling of the watchtower will aid this effort. Meanwhile, Israeli air violations continued on an almost daily basis during the reporting period. We look forward to the outcomes of the current consultations on the UNIFIL mandate.

In conclusion, we urge the parties to respond positively to the efforts under way to create the conditions for an early resumption and early conclusion of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, as well as to efforts to promote progress towards comprehensive regional peace. The Secretary-General remains committed to working with the parties and his international partners for an end of the occupation that began in 1967 and the establishment of a Palestinian State living side by side in peace with Israel, within secure and recognized borders, and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The President: I thank Mr. Fernandez-Taranco for his very helpful briefing. In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 11.25 a.m.